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"Work" in Ecclesiastes

HINCKLEY G. MITCHELL

TUFTS COLLEGE

THE book of Ecclesiastes is in some respects one of the most interesting in the Old Testament. The linguist, for example, finds in it grammatical and lexical peculiarities in plenty and the critic a curious problem of origin and composition. More important, however, than its linguistic form or its literary history is the tenor of its content in comparison with the teaching of other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. It was inevitable, therefore, that it would provoke discussion of its essential merits and find admirers to commend it to the general public. The latter office has been well performed by Professor John F. Genung, whose *Words of Koheleth* is an enthusiastic presentation of the ideas he finds in the work and is excellent reading. It was this book that suggested the present paper by the place it assigns to work in the experience and the philosophy of the Preacher. The subject is treated at length in the "Introductory Study," where (pp. 83 f.), after quoting 3 22, the significant part of which Professor Genung renders, "there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own work," he proceeds as follows:

"There is nothing, I am inclined to think, that has had such scant justice at the hands of Koheleth's interpreters as this his gospel of work. It has been almost invariably ignored by the side of the eating and drinking with which it is so generally associated. Koheleth has accordingly—or a part of him, in these modern times of critical dissection—been identified with Epicureanism; as if after all his desperately earnest quest for the highest good of life, he had reduced his ideal to praise of gorging and guzzling and what young folks call 'having a

good time.' No book was ever less Epicurean than this. Note the passages wherein he mentions eating and drinking, and you always find a working man there, a man who can draw up to table with a good healthful appetite, and sleep sweetly whether he eat little or much, because he has found his work, the expression of his plans and his skill and his individuality, and takes it as what God meant him to have, and makes it his own by rejoicing in it. There is nothing better for man than this, Koheleth avers; nay, in the solid and usable sense this comprehends it all." He adds, on pp. 89 f.: "There are but two possessions,' says Professor Carl Hilty, 'which may be attained by persons of every condition, which never desert one through life, and are a constant consolation in misfortune. These are work and love. Those who shut these blessings out of life commit a greater sin than suicide. They do not even know what it is that they throw away. Rest without work is a thing which in this life one cannot endure.' Of these two possessions Koheleth, rebuking the too self-indulgent dreams of his age, has fallen back on the first, on work; and out of it, as accepted in joy, has drawn for life a noble resource of courage and cheer."

The thought here presented is indeed an inspiring one, and "worthy of all acceptance," but Professor Barton seems not to have found it in the passage cited or elsewhere in the book of Ecclesiastes, and this fact suggests the question whether it can properly be attributed to the original author of the work.

The first step in the discussion of this question is the examination of the terms employed in Ecclesiastes, or that part of it which may safely be regarded as genuine,¹ of the sort of activity, or its product, that may, with more or less propriety, be called "work." The Hebrew verb that is so rendered in

¹ The following are the passages the genuineness of which is denied or suspected by Professor Barton in his commentary: 2 26a; 3 17; 4 5; 5 3/2, 7 6a; 7 1a, 3, 5-9, 11 f. 18b-19, 26b, 29; 8 1, 2b-3a, 5-6a, 11-13; 9 17 f.; 10 1-3, 8-14a, 15, 18 f.; 11 9b; 12 1a, 9-14. They will be ignored in the present discussion because, so far as they have any bearing on the result, they are so widely at variance with the rest of the book, that they simply cannot have come from the same author, but must have been added by some person or persons for the purpose of neutralizing his teaching.

2 11 and 17 and 3 9 is the one (*ʿāśah*) that is generally translated *do*, in the sense of *effect*, *accomplish*, even in Ecclesiastes, and might as well have been so translated in these three passages. Its meaning is clearly seen in 2 2, "I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it"? where it is implied, not only that these indulgences actually effect nothing of real value, but that it is not in them, however much they may be practiced, to effect anything of the kind; also in 11 5, where God is described as the one who "doeth everything," that is, not only does all that is done, but never exerts his power without accomplishing the desired object.

Such being the force of the verb, the noun (*maʿāśeh*) derived from it naturally has a corresponding meaning. In other words, it is used of effective activity, or the product of it. A good example of the former of these usages is found in a passage already quoted (11 5), where the author makes the comparison. "As thou knowest not the way of the wind, . . . even so thou knowest not the work of God." In the other passages in which the phrase, "the work of God," appears (3 11; 7 13; 8 17) it seems to refer to the product of the divine activity in creation, and perhaps in history.

The same meanings are found in the passages in which the work in question is the work of human beings. Thus, in 9 10 the reader is warned that there is "no work," no productive employment such as the upper world affords, "in Sheol"; and the word seems to be used in the same sense in the phrase "skilful work," or "skill in work," of 4 4; but in 2 17; 5 6, and 8 9 it doubtless denotes the product of human activity. So, also, in 4 3, with its "evil work," and 8 14, where "the work of the wicked" and "the work of the righteous" are contrasted. The clearest cases are 1 14; 2 4 and 11, and 9 7, where the noun has the plural form. Here belongs, also, if it is properly translated in the English Version, 3 22 (which Professor Genung [p. 83] quotes incorrectly, substituting "work" for "works"), in support of his contention that the "joy" which the Preacher regarded as the highest good "was not in the thing done, but in the doing of it."

The substitution of the singular for the plural in the passage

just cited is plainly a slip of the pen or a typographical error, since in his translation on another page (256) he uses the latter. In his comments on the passage, however, he again lays himself open to criticism, when he says that "the word translated *works* is the one that represents work in its nobler creative aspect," and refers to p. 246, whence it appears that *ma'aseh* is the word intended. But, as has just been shown, this word is used of the bad practices of men as well as of their creative activity. It will therefore be necessary to insist on the broader definition, effective activity or the product of it, already given. The word *ma'aseh* always means work in one of these senses in Ecclesiastes, and conversely, wherever the English word in either of these senses is found, it is a translation of *ma'aseh*, except in one case, in 9 1, where the corresponding Aramaic word, *'abhadh*, in the plural is substituted.

The word "work" in Ecclesiastes, since it always denotes effective activity or the product of it, implies that the thing undertaken is within the capacity of the doer, but it does not indicate to what degree his resources are taxed in achieving the desired result. In point of fact, there are some things that require very little effort and others that can only be done with great, or the utmost, exertion. Now, the Hebrew, like other languages, has a verb (*'amal*) that denotes wearisome activity, and therefore, in the English Version, is always and properly rendered "labor," while the noun derived from it is represented by the corresponding English noun.

The difference, in general, between "labor" and "work," and the relation between them, is clearly illustrated in the book of Ecclesiastes. In the first place, since there is no limit to the ability of the Almighty, *'asah* is constantly, but *amal* never, used of the divine activity or the outcome of its application. Second, since there are things which, although they are within man's capacity, can only be achieved by wearisome exertion, both terms are sometimes used of the same example of human activity. A good illustration is found in 3 9, where the Preacher asks, "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?" that is, what profit has the doer of anything that he can accomplish only by wearisome effort?

and another in 2 11, where he describes his achievements, first as "the works that my hands had wrought," and then as "the labor that I had labored to do," that is, the results that, by wearisome effort, I had produced. Third, since there is a limit to human capacity, *'amal* is used where *'asah* would not be appropriate, as, for example, in 8 17, where the Preacher complains that, "however much man may labor to seek," that is, however laboriously man may seek, he is not able to comprehend "the work of God." At first sight 5 16 seems to be a similar case, but the man who has attained wealth by his labor can hardly be said to have failed of accomplishment, although he cannot carry away the fruits of his labor "in his hand."

Like *'asah*, *'amal* has a nominal derivative with differing meanings. In the first place, and oftenest, it presents the thought of the verb in the form of a substantive. It has this sense in 1 3, where it is employed as a kind of internal accusative, with the verb from which it is derived; a construction that is found, also, in 2 20 and 22, 5 18, and 9 9. In 2 24, by virtue of its verbal character, it becomes about equivalent to an infinitive, for, in this passage "in his labor" means in his laboring, or, to use the English idiom, while he labors. See, also, 8 15 and 9 9, and, further, 3 13, where the English Version has "in all his labor," that is, so long as he labors. Here, doubtless, belongs 5 19, to which it will be necessary to return in another connection. Finally, the verbal noun occurs in various constructions in 4 8 and 9, 5 15, and 6 7.

The passages in which *'amal* denotes the product of wearisome activity are less numerous, but there are indubitable examples. The first is in 2 11, where, as has already been shown, *'amal* is used of the same results of the Preacher's activity as *ma'aseh*. In 2 18-21 there are no fewer than three cases of this kind, for, of course, when the Preacher says he "must leave it," he means the "labor," that is, the product of the labor, to which he has just referred. In 4 6, too, where the author declares "a handful of rest" to be better than "two handfuls of labor," by "labor" he must mean the fruits of it. In other words, he says he would rather rest a day than have the wages for two days, if he himself had to earn them. To

be sure, the phrase that follows, if it be rendered "and striving after wind," does not favor this interpretation, but the contrary is true if it be rendered "feeding on wind" or "vexation of spirit," for either of which there is the best ancient authority.²

There is reason to believe that still a third somewhat differing sense for *'amal* is to be found under a mistaken reading in 3 11. The verse is wrongly translated in the Authorized English Version. The American Revision has, "He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also he hath put eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." Professor Genung has in some respects improved upon this rendering. He translates, "Everything hath he made beautiful in its time; also he hath put eternity in their heart;—yet not so that man findeth out the work which God hath wrought, from the beginning, and to the end." In the original, however, the word rendered "eternity," as well as "everything," is emphatic. It would therefore be better to render the second clause, "Moreover, eternity hath he put into their hearts." It would also be preferable to connect these words more closely with what follows, for, although the thought of the unchangeableness of God's works is not foreign to the book of Ecclesiastes, being clearly stated in v. 14 of the same chapter, such an expression as "in their hearts," meaning the hearts of certain things, is very rare anywhere in the Old Testament. When, however, these changes have been made, the result is by no means satisfactory. It is still necessary to explain the appearance of the word "eternity" in this connection. How can one who, as did the Preacher, consigned man and beast alike to a death beyond which he saw "no work, or device, or knowledge, or wisdom," have said, or meant to say, that God "hath put eternity," that is, "the idea of eternity," "the effort and ability to conceive it" (Wildeboer), into the hearts of men, and then have lost, as he must have done, the way out of his desperate difficulties?

² For the former, see the Greek versions of Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus; for the latter the Vulgate, the Peshitto, and the Targum.

When the biblical student is confronted by such unlikely alternatives he is warranted in resorting to emendation, especially if, as in this case, a better reading "springt in die Augen," forces itself upon his acceptance. It requires only the transposition of two letters. The word rendered "eternity" is *'olam*, which is here written defectively, Transpose the last two of the three consonants composing it (l—m) and the result is the combination (m—l) found in the word *'amal*, labor. The verse will then read, "Everything hath he made beautiful in its time; moreover, labor," that is,—and this constitutes the third usage for the word,—a compulsion to activity, sometimes wearisome, "hath he put into men's hearts, yet not so that they find out the work that God hath done from the beginning to the end." In other words, he asserts that God has implanted in man a disposition which, if not regulated and restrained, impels him (man) to undertake tasks that he has not the ability to accomplish.

The correctness of this emendation, and the interpretation given to the verse as emended, is strongly supported by the following considerations: 1. In the verse preceding the Preacher refers to the "travail," as the English Version has it, "which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised," busied, "therewith." Now, it is clear that here, as in 1 13, he has in mind the search for wisdom "concerning all that is done under heaven." If so, v. 11, as emended, not only harmonizes with, but furnishes an explanation for, the preceding verse. 2. The emendation suggested brings the passage as a whole into striking accord with 8 17, which reads, "I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun, because, however much man may labor to seek," that is, however laboriously he may seek, "he doth not find. Yea, if the wise man think to know, he doth not learn." 3. The reading *'olam*, in 3 11, may be explained as either a copyist's mistake, due to the actual occurrence of this word in v. 14, or to an attempt of a scribe to bring the two passages into harmony with each other.

Two terms, denoting as many phases of activity, especially human, have now been discussed. A third, *'inyan*, which, as

already noted, in the English Version is generally rendered "travail," remains to be considered. It and the verb from which it is derived ('*anah*) are found only in Ecclesiastes. Professor Genung prefers *toil* for both, but the latest lexicon defines the verb as the equivalent of "be busied" or "be occupied," and gives the noun a corresponding meaning. The latter seems to be the more defensible explanation. In other words, '*inyan* denotes "business," regular or continuous employment, without reference to results obtained. That it is incessant, is clear from 2 23, which may be translated, "All his days are troublous, and his business vexatious, even at night his heart resteth not"; and 8 16, where the Preacher cites as an example one "that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes." That it is also, sometimes at least, ineffective, appears from 1 13, 4 8, and 5 14, where "sore travail" and "evil adventure" are about equivalent to the modern expression "poor business".

These are the terms for work in three of its phases that are used in the book of Ecclesiastes. The next step is to consider the field in which the Preacher finds them applied. At first his survey is confined to the limits of his own experience. He represents himself as Solomon. Now, Solomon was a king, and, according to tradition, a very able and wealthy one into the bargain. A person in such circumstances is lifted above the sordid drudgery of life. Not having to work for a living, if he exerts himself, it is in the attainment of things not reckoned among the necessities of existence. The Preacher acts in harmony with the circumstances assumed. He first employs the leisure his wealth procures him in observation of the world about him, not in the desultory way of a dilettante, but with the energy and persistence of a thorough student. "I gave myself," he says, "to seeking and searching by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven." See 1 13. He did not confine himself to the doings of men, but extended his researches to the work of God in the world. See 3 11. He made a business of becoming wise, and labored early and late as one labors for one's daily bread. He succeeded so far as to acquire wisdom above that of all who had been before him in Jerusalem (1 16), but, because he acquired to gratify himself,

and not to supply a demand in himself or others, he finally tired of his high enterprise and took to a less admirable form of activity.

He turned from the pursuit of knowledge to the enjoyment of his wealth and the manifold pleasures that it could procure him, drawing on his peculiar wisdom to help him in this new field. He gives a list of the means by which he undertook to amuse himself. It sounds like an inventory of the fads and follies of a modern millionaire. First he tried indulgence in wine, to which men in all ages have resorted as the readiest means for securing a pleasurable reaction. He tried it thoroughly. "I searched in my heart," he says, "how to cheer my flesh, my heart leading me wisely." At the same time, always with his finger on his pulse, he tested the effects of folly, "to see what it was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives." See 23. He made a business of these pursuits, but, as they yielded no tangible results, he next devoted himself to the production of "works" that would increase his fame as well as please his taste and afford him comfort. He built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens and parks, and pools to water his plantations, and surrounded himself with servants male and female in great numbers. Meanwhile, in spite of the immense outlays required for these great works, his wealth in flocks and herds, silver and gold, and the costly presents of kings and princes steadily increased, and he added to his luxuries singers male and female; also, following the practice of oriental monarchs, an extensive harem. See 24ff. In short, as he says, he denied himself nothing that promised gratification to his luxurious senses. Thus he became a great voluptuary, a greater than all who had been before him in Jerusalem. See 29.

The Preacher, it will have been noticed, is very specific with reference to his own fields of effort. When he comes to consider the world at work he is overwhelmed by the multifold activities in which men are engaged "under the sun." See 113. He does not attempt to catalogue them,—for 31-8 is rather a list of divine appointments,—but either directly or indirectly he makes the reader acquainted with some of them. In the

first place, it appears from 5 19 that there were some besides himself who, in the popular sense of the word, could afford to pursue wisdom or pleasure. There were, however, others, and indeed great masses of men, to whom life was only a struggle to satisfy their physical needs. He must have had them especially in mind when he wrote (6 7), "all the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not satisfied." Among them were the husbandmen, to whom, and to the insistence of their calling, he refers in 11 4 and 6. The Preacher found, also, among his contemporaries a class in whom, according to 4 4, pride was the dominant motive, and among whom there was sometimes bitter rivalry and competition. But it is those who were impelled by the desire for wealth to whom he gives the most serious attention. He pictures their efforts in 2 21 ff., the skill they expend, the anxiety they suffer, and the effect of the tension upon their health and their happiness. He returns to the subject in 4 8 and 5 13 ff.

It is not necessary to pursue this line of thought farther. The Preacher, according to his own showing, evidently was, or had been, a busy man, and he found in the world about him nothing more impressive than the varied activity among men, excited, as he explained, by an inner necessity implanted in all alike by their Creator. It is this activity which, with its product, when it is effective, he calls work, or, if it seriously taxes the ability of the agent, whether it is effective or not, labor.

What, now, is the attitude of the Preacher toward work as he knew it by experience and observation? Professor Genung finds it noble, and in the highest degree inspiring, a veritable "gospel" to the appreciative reader; and he describes the workingman, according to Ecclesiastes, as "a man who can draw up to table with a good healthy appetite, sleep sweetly whether he eat little or much, because he has found his work, the expression of his plans and his skill and his individuality, and takes it as what God meant him to have, and makes it his own by rejoicing in it." It is doubtful, however, if this is a defensible interpretation. In the first place, it is significant that, whatever else he may say with reference to his own or

others' activity, he finally recognizes in it a form of labor, that is, a wearisome tax on human ability. Thus, although in 1 13ff. he does not use the term "labor" of his own search for wisdom, in 8 17 he represents any such search as laborious, and in 2 11 he describes the works by which he undertook to amuse himself as the products of labor. It is labor, also, by which the husbandman obtains his bread (6 7), the artisan his skill (4 4), and the man of means his wealth. See 5 16. It should also be noted that the Preacher several times prefixes to the word "labor" the modifier "all," which, like "much" or "great," largely increases the peculiar significance of the noun. See 1 3; 2 18. 19. 20. 22; 4 8; 5 18. These passages are sufficiently convincing, but, when one recalls that in 4 8 and elsewhere the Preacher represents labor as a constant factor in human life, the total impression is that to him, so far from being welcome and agreeable, it was a source of dissatisfaction and irritation. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him comparing rest and labor to the disadvantage of the latter, declaring in 4 6 that "a handful of rest is better than two handfuls of labor." He expresses himself more strongly in 2 23, where he says of the man who labors for wealth that "his days are painful and his business grievous; yea, even at night his heart hath no rest"; and in 5 17, where he declares that "all his days also he is in darkness, and mourning, and great vexation, and sickness, and wrath." Here, also, belongs the expression "poor," literally "bad," "business" in 1 13 and 4 8, and "business" without the modifier, but with the parenthetical remark, "for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes," in 8 16.

It is, however, the profitlessness of labor to which the Preacher refers with most feeling. In 2 17 he says he "hated life" because the work done under the sun was grievous to him, in that it was all "vanity and strife after wind." The last clause must not be misunderstood. It does not mean that the work of the world is without results. The term used, as has been shown, is one that implies achievement. The thought is that the results achieved, in view of certain facts that are cited in the same connection, are not worth the exertion

required to produce them. Thus, in v. 15 the search for wisdom is pronounced vain because it does not preserve the winner from the common fate of all mankind, and in v. 18 f. the pursuit of wealth is represented as equally vain because the possessor cannot himself enjoy it indefinitely or make sure that, when he is obliged to part with it, it will fall to worthy heirs. See also 5 13 ff. A similar explanation must be supplied in 1 13 and 2 11, where no reason is given. These passages, therefore, have a double bearing. They show, not only, negatively, that the author of them had no love for work for its own sake, but, positively, that thought, desire, and purpose in him were focused upon the results in wisdom, pleasure, or some other fancied good, of his endeavors.

This view of the Preacher's attitude toward work seems inevitable, but there are some passages, not in the list of interpolations above given, which seem to forbid it. One of them is 2 10, or the latter part of it; but, since its phraseology is peculiar and to some extent ambiguous, it will be best to leave it until two or three others that have been interpreted as teaching a gospel of work have been considered.

Take, first, 3 12 f. Here the Preacher asserts that there is nothing better for men than "to rejoice, and get good," literally "in their life," that is, as the English Version has it, "so long as they live." He enlarges upon this declaration by saying, „Yea, that every man eat and drink, and see good in all his labor; it is the gift of God." Here it is perfectly clear that to the author's mind the highest good is enjoyment, and that it is derived, to some extent at least, from eating and drinking. It is equally evident that, as in v. 12 the object of enjoyment is not life but the good acquired during life, so in v. 13 it is not labor but the good experienced during labor. In other words, this enjoyment is an offset to, and a solace for, the wearisome activity in which men in general are engaged; and it is this offset or solace that is the gift of God.

The same ideas are somewhat differently, but clearly enough, expressed in 5 18: "Behold that which I have seen to be good and comely is to eat, and drink, and see good in all one's labor, wherein one laboreth under the sun, all the days of the

life that God hath given one; it is one's portion." It is therefore necessary to interpret "rejoice in his labor" in the next verse as meaning "rejoice while he labors". A more convincing passage, however, is 8 15, where the Preacher says, "I commended enjoyment, declaring that there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy, and let this accompany him in his labor all the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun"; which is expanded in 9 7 ff. as follows: "Go, eat with joy thy bread, and drink with a merry heart thy wine, for God hath accepted thy works. Let thy garments always be white, and let not oil be lacking on thy head. See life with the woman whom thou lovest all the days of thy vain life which he hath given thee under the sun, for it is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun." In this passage the author's rule of life is presented in its most attractive form. It is based on the doctrine of divine sovereignty and predestination. He believed that the course of things in the world and in the lives of men was ordained by God (11 5); also that in the course of events the evil that men suffered was, to some extent at least, offset by a certain amount of good placed within their reach. See 3 1 ff.; 7 14. This is the gift of God, and man's portion. See 2 24; 9 9. Work, as has been shown, he like the author of Gen. 3, reckoned an evil to which men were inwardly urged, but from which they could to a great extent escape, if they were willing to deny themselves the exceptional acquisitions on which human energy was expended, and for which, so far as necessary, they could find a solace in the homely pleasures of the simple life.

This in outline is the teaching of Ecclesiastes in the passages in which the Preacher most fully and clearly unfolds his philosophy of life. It remains to examine two that are said to tell a different story. One of them is 2 10, which, it will be remembered, was cited only to be reserved for later consideration. Professor Genung renders the latter part of it, "My heart derived joy from all my labor, and this was my portion from all my labor" and comments thereon as follows: "The joy comes, it is to be noted, from the labor, not from the

eventualized results of it or from the reward that he gets for it." But is this the proper interpretation of the passage? The word that Professor Genung here renders "joy" is the same that in vv. 1f. he translates "pleasure." But in v. 1 the pleasure by which the Preacher proposes to test his heart is the passing enjoyment of what he calls "good," that is, the things that are generally regarded as blessings, and in the first part of v. 10 itself the parallelism,

"Whatever mine eyes desired I kept not from them,

I withheld not my heart from any joy,"

makes evident that the joy in question is the enjoyment of the objects of desire, such as the houses, vineyards, etc. previously enumerated. This being the case, the verse is thus far in general agreement with the passages already discussed, but it differs from them in this, that, while they have in view the simple blessings that are within the reach of the great majority of mankind, it refers to the luxuries which the Preacher found not worth the effort necessary to obtain them.

In the latter part of the verse one naturally expects to find a continuation of the same line of thought, the joy there meant being the temporary enjoyment of the luxuries to which the author turned when he abandoned the pursuit of wisdom. But how could anyone call such joy his "portion" and in the same breath (v. 11) describe the labor from which it came as utterly vain and unprofitable? The contradiction is undeniable, and the only way to remedy it is to refer 10b to an editor who had the language of the book at his tongue's end, but had not taken the trouble to master its meaning; when, of course, it ceases to be a matter of importance whether the labor intended is effort for its own sake or the results of endeavor.

The latter is the more natural interpretation, and it is supported by 3 22, the second of the passages requiring special attention. It was quoted in part at the beginning of the paper, and again in the discussion of the term *ma'aseh*, work, where attention was called to the error in Professor Genung's translation of it on p. 83 of his *Words of Koheleth*. The whole verse is properly rendered in the English Version, where it reads, "Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better than that a

man should rejoice in his works, for that is his portion; for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" Here the author, by the word "works," undoubtedly, as has been shown, means the results of human activity, probably having in mind such works as are described in 24f. In any case, it is clear that the joy here commended is the enjoyment, not, as Professor Genung says, of work for its own sake, but of the products or achievements of such activity, and that, therefore, there is the same disagreement between this passage and 2 24, etc., that there was between 10b and 10a of chapter 2; that is, that this verse, like 2 10b, is an interpolation. The clause, "that is his portion," points in the same direction, for, according to the Preacher, as appears from 2 24f., the only enjoyment worth having is not won by man himself by any amount of effort, but is the gift of God.³ See also 3 13; 5 18f.; 9 9. If it should be objected that 4 1, the first words of which should be rendered, "Again I saw," witnesses to the genuineness of this verse, the answer would be an easy one, namely, that, since the verb "saw" is not used in the same sense in the two cases, it is more than probable that the verb "return" in the sense of "again" is itself an interpolation, having been added by the same thoughtless editor by whom 3 22 was inserted. For a similar case, see Gen. 28 18.⁴

The elimination of these spurious passages leaves the matter of the Preacher's attitude toward work consistent and intelligible. He found no "gospel" in it, but regarded it as a folly to be shunned when it was not a misfortune to be endured. The only comfort he found for himself or his fellows "under the sun" he found in the satisfaction of the normal physical appetites while they endured. Note the limitations in this statement. First, it is only the cravings of his physical, as

³ In v. 25 read, with the Greek and Syriac versions, "who eateth or drinketh except from him," that is God?

⁴ It is possible that in 9 7 the clause, "for God hath already accepted thy works," ought also to be omitted. It bears a certain resemblance to those above considered, disturbs the rhythm of the passage in which it is found, and apparently contradicts 9 1, where the Preacher declares that man's experience of good or evil furnishes no clue to the actual attitude of God toward him.

distinguished from his intellectual or spiritual, nature that he thought it worth while to appease, such attainments as wisdom and righteousness seeming to cost too much labor to be at all profitable. See 1 18; 7 16. Second, he limited himself and his kind to the gratification of the normal appetites, because any excess had to be paid for by increased labor. See 2 11. Finally, since all the enjoyment he could promise himself or anyone else was of a sensual character, he did not expect it to last even until death, but constantly reminded himself and them that beyond a certain stage in life it would grow less and less with increasing years. See 9 6; 11 8. The fact is, that there is no gospel of any kind in the book of Ecclesiastes in its original form and dimensions. Its shallow philosophy ignores all that is best and noblest in human character and experience, and thus robs youth of its dreams, manhood of its rewards, and old age of its consolations. What wonder, then, that the author found life empty and closed, as he began, with the pessimistic refrain, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity." And what wonder that the guardians of the moral and religious interests of the Jews, fearing either to suppress his book or to permit it to be circulated as it was written, interpolated it with their pious proverbs, thus giving it an appearance of registering the "greatest triumph of Old Testament piety" (Cornill) and making it a possible means of grace to their own and many subsequent generations.